

VZCZCXRO7825  
RR RUEHHM  
DE RUEHHI #1088/01 2660023  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 220023Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8500  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 5134  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 6455  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//USDP/ISA/AP/ES//  
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J00/J005/J006/J01LA/J06/J5//  
RHEHNSC/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001088

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/EP, EAP/RSP, EAP/PD, OES/PCI  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR ANE, G/ENV  
STATE PASS TO EPA/OIA (DENNIS CUNNINGHAM AND MARK KASMAN)  
STATE PASS TO EPA/ORD (KEVIN TEICHMAN)  
STATE PASS TO OGHA/HHS (STIEGER/VALDEZ/HICKEY)  
CDC FOR OGHA (BLOUT/MCCALL) AND NCEH (THOMAS SINKS)  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (THOMAS SHUBERT AND WILLIAM VAN HOUTEN)  
HHS PASS TO FIC/NIH (GLASS) AND NIEHS/NIH  
BANGKOK PASS TO RDMA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [KPAO](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: THIRD ANNUAL JAC GETS DOWN TO BUSINESS

Ref: A. 07 Hanoi 1476  
[1](#)B. Hanoi 2113  
[1](#)C. Hanoi 2009  
[1](#)D. Hanoi 1862

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. During the third annual Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) on Agent Orange/dioxin, JAC members reviewed U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation on Agent Orange-related issues over the past year, discussed ongoing remediation and health projects, and provided recommendations for future activities, including USAID implementation of the remainder of the USD 3 million appropriated by Congress in 2007. For the first time, JAC members invited participation from several key donors to review how to best collaborate. Following the JAC, the U.S. Embassy hosted a briefing session for the broader donor community to update them on U.S. engagement and to encourage them to join a multilateral effort on Agent Orange/dioxin and broader public health issues. High-level Government of Vietnam (GVN) and USG participation resulted in broad and largely positive press coverage. End Summary.

#### Delegations

-----

[1](#)2. (U) The GVN hosted the third annual Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) on Agent Orange/dioxin in Hanoi from September 8-11 (Ref A). Reflecting the importance of the meeting, Vietnamese Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Pham Khoi Nguyen and Vice Minister Tran Hong Ha provided opening remarks. The U.S. delegation, led by EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator Kevin Teichman, included representatives from the Departments of State, Defense and Health and Human Services, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and USAID. Scot Marciel, U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN, attended one session. The Vietnamese delegation, led by Dr. Le Ke Son, the Director General of Office 33 (the GVN body responsible for coordinating Agent Orange/dioxin policy), included representatives from the Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Health, along with experts from the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology.

#### Coordinating with Other Donors

-----

[1](#)3. (U) Recognizing the increasingly multilateral approach to Agent Orange/dioxin issues (Refs B and C), the JAC members invited the

participation of several key donors with ongoing environmental remediation or health projects, including UNDP, UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, and the Czech Republic. These donors joined in several JAC sessions to discuss how to better integrate their efforts with continuing GVN responses and planned USAID projects. Following the JAC, the U.S. Embassy hosted a briefing for representatives of over 15 bilateral donors and international organizations to review the JAC, seek input for joint projects, and encourage participants to join the broad coalition on Agent Orange/dioxin and broader environmental and public health issues. Encouraged by details of U.S. engagement and GVN cooperation, the gathering agreed to meet regularly to coordinate efforts.

#### Focusing on Practical Advice

-----

¶4. (U) This year's JAC tried to move away from set presentations to allow more interactive dialogue focused on practical recommendations. In particular, U.S. EPA representatives began detailed discussions with their counterparts from the Ministry of Defense (MOD) on specific calculations of soil volumes for remediation, evaluation of MOD bioremediation efforts at the Bien Hoa airbase, and suggestions for how to improve those remediation efforts. To best ensure prompt action, JAC members agreed that overall remediation efforts should be broken down into component parts to allow remediators to begin work on the easiest tasks first. U.S. JAC members stated their willingness to review Vietnamese studies of the possible health impacts of exposure to dioxin, which continue to suffer from methodological weaknesses.

#### Ability to Help Shape GVN Remediation Strategies

HANOI 00001088 002 OF 003

-----

¶5. (SBU) The GVN explicitly laid out its remediation targets for the three priority airbases, seeking immediate assistance for efforts at Danang where it plans to complete a runway extension through currently contaminated areas by 2010 as part of airport renovation. At Phu Cat, the GVN envisioned support from the Czech Republic, while MOD would maintain tight control over ongoing remediation efforts at Bien Hoa, which, unlike Danang and Phu Cat, remains an active military base. UNDP and Office 33 are finalizing an overall remediation plan, which they will submit to the JAC for review and comment. Similarly, MOD has begun drafting its own remediation strategy, which it will provide to the JAC prior to submission to the Prime Minister for final approval.

#### Visit to Bien Hoa

-----

¶6. (SBU) The U.S. JAC delegation traveled to Bien Hoa to meet with the Chair of the Dong Nai Province People's Committee, review possible pathways for dioxin contamination in areas surrounding the airbase, and begin a dialogue with provincial environmental and health officials. Despite providing detailed information regarding ongoing remediation efforts, MOD refused permission to the U.S. JAC members to enter the airbase. In the past, MOD allowed representatives from UNDP and a Canadian environmental consulting company to access the base to take samples.

#### JAC Recommendations

-----

¶7. (SBU) JAC recommendations focused on areas where members hope to remain active throughout the year (Note: detailed recommendations are included in the minutes, which will be sent separately). The two delegations agreed to set up environmental remediation and health taskforces to review specific projects, create priorities, and estimate budgets (Note: The Ford Foundation will provide funding to the GVN to facilitate taskforce participation). For example, in addition to the advice detailed in paragraph 4 above, the environmental taskforce will work to flesh out a detailed "roadmap" for remediation efforts at the Danang airbase. Additionally, JAC members advised USAID on how to best implement remaining funds from the USD 3 million appropriated by Congress in 2007.

Press coverage

-----

18. (U) The JAC received significant television and print media coverage, particularly during the first session when dozens of media representatives were allowed to listen to presentations by Minister Nguyen, the JAC co-chairs, and Ambassador Michalak. Reflecting a continued shift in Agent Orange/dioxin reporting (ref D), most stories provided factual accounts of the proceedings, prominently noting initial U.S. implementation of the USD 3 million at Danang and highlighting U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation. Some reports stated that the U.S. should supplement the USD 3 million with additional funding, while a few articles quoted Minister Nguyen's scientifically-unfounded assertion that millions of children and grandchildren born to those exposed to Agent Orange suffer disabilities linked to that exposure.

Comment

-----

19. (SBU) As the JAC becomes more "hands on," its value will increase. While it will continue to advise policymakers how to spend remediation and health funds, JAC members also have begun to advise the GVN how to save money in its remediation efforts, lowering total costs and hopefully easing pressure on U.S. funding. The two taskforces will provide the framework for greater input in environmental and health decision making. JAC members will play an important role in reviewing possible cooperative efforts. At the same time, an increasingly invigorated JAC is only one piece of the puzzle and we need to craft a comprehensive strategy for how to "normalize" Agent Orange/dioxin as one of many areas of development

HANOI 00001088 003 OF 003

assistance, build a multilateral coalition to address specific environmental and health projects, and use active public diplomacy to desensitize the subject among the Vietnamese population.

MICHALAK